

## FACT SHEET

# MANAGING THE RISK OF VIOLENCE AT WORK

Violence is a serious matter that has been an increasing issue at many consumer services workplaces. It is unacceptable and should not be tolerated. The Consumer Services Industry Reference Group, made up of employer and worker representatives from the industry, has produced this fact sheet to assist in managing the risk of violence. By understanding what it is and what to do about it, employers and workers will be better informed about how to reduce and prevent it from happening.



### WHAT IS VIOLENCE?

Violence at work is any incident where a person is physically attacked, abused or threatened in the workplace. This not only includes being a victim of robbery but also involves other types of threatening behaviour that can make you feel at risk. Behaviours can include:

- abusive communication, whether it's verbal or non-verbal gestures eg banging on a table, throwing an object, forcing a door, pushing or obstruction
- physical abuse or assault
- behaviours that create an environment of fear eg intimidation, aggression, threatened attack.

Violence can be:

- customer initiated in order to get what they want
- a random public act by a person
- internal violence within an organisation between workers or supervisor and worker.



### HOW DOES IT AFFECT ME?

Violence can result in serious physical and/or psychological injury or even death. It can lead to significant legal, economic and emotional effects. For employers, it can result in poor morale and a bad image of the organisation, making it difficult to employ and keep workers.



### HOW DO YOU KNOW IF VIOLENCE IS A PROBLEM AT WORK?

Employers need to ask their workers to find out if there are any problems with violence at work. This can be done through managers, supervisors and safety representatives or even by doing a short questionnaire to find out if workers ever feel threatened. Other ways can include looking through injury and incident records.



### WHAT CAN YOU DO ABOUT IT?

Violence that results in a physical attack or a threat to life, whether it is from a member of the public or co-worker, is a criminal offence. Such incidents should be reported immediately to the local Police Station or in case of an emergency by dialling 000. Action may be taken by WorkCover NSW if the legal obligations of the employer to provide adequate systems of work to ensure the health and safety of workers have not been met.

Workers need to let their employers know immediately if they do not feel safe and then follow safety procedures developed by their employer. Employers must provide a safe environment for their workers. They can manage the risk of violence by providing adequate safety procedures for workers to follow and should encourage workers to report incidents. That way, the employer can do something about the violence to stop it from getting worse and prevent it from happening at all in the future.

Working together to fix the problem is everyone's responsibility. Employers need to involve/consult workers to come up with solutions to fix the problem. Important aspects for employers to consider are:

- **training** so workers are aware of any warning signs to prevent an escalation of an incident or know how to deal with violence so that it can be minimised
- **adequate supervision and staffing** so workers can deal with situations that may put them at risk and are not left in vulnerable situations on their own
- **investigation** and regular reviews of all violence incidents and trends so workers know violence is taken seriously and to ensure procedures and measures to control the risk of violence are working.

## MORE INFORMATION

For further information call WorkCover NSW on **13 10 50** or your union/industry association.

The following publications are available from WorkCover. This fact sheet is also available on the WorkCover website ([www.workcover.nsw.gov.au/publications](http://www.workcover.nsw.gov.au/publications)) with links to the publications below:

- Violence in the Workplace – Guide 2002 (Cat. no. 70.1)
- Workplace Violence Awareness (Cat. no. 4118)
- Workplace Violence Prevention (Cat. no. 4121)
- Workplace Violence Intervention (Cat. no. 4119)
- Workplace Violence Legal Consequences (Cat. no. 4120)
- Workplace Violence Prevention Strategies for your Business (Cat. no. 4316)
- Armed Hold-ups and Cash Handling – A Guide to Protecting People and Profits from Armed Hold-ups (Cat. no. 69)
- Violence and Robbery in the Retail Industry – Guide 2002 (Cat. no. 694)
- Workplace Violence in the Finance Sector (Cat. no. 4348)
- Fact Sheet – Managing the Risk of Violence in Supermarkets and Department Stores (Cat. no. 699)
- Code of Practice - Cash in Transit 2002 (Cat. no. 1203)
- Fact Sheet – Managing the Risk of Robbery and Violence in Service Stations (Cat. no. 695)
- Fact Sheet – Managing the Risk of Robbery and Violence in Bottle Shops (Cat. no. 697)
- Fact Sheet – Managing the Risk of Robbery and Violence in Convenience Stores and Newsagencies (Cat. no. 696)
- Fact Sheet – Managing the Risk of Robbery and Violence in Pharmacies (Cat. no. 698)

## Disclaimer

This fact sheet does not create any statutory duties under the occupational health and safety legislation. To ensure that you comply with your legal obligations, you should refer to the requirements contained in the *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2000* and the *Occupational Health and Safety Regulation 2001*.

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